

1998 WEATHER CROP SUMMARY BY QUARTERS

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1ST QUARTER

(January, February, March)

January began with mild spring-like temperatures that would turn into freezing temperatures by the end of the month. Some Southwestern localities received as much as forty inches of snow. Due to the unexpected snowfall in January, some livestock producers were not able to move hay to feed their livestock for days. Top dressing of small grains was also delayed because of weather conditions.

Brief warm weather at February's end melted the remaining snow in fields and contributed to already excessive topsoil moisture supplies. Eighteen percent of crops were in poor condition due to excessive rainfall. Producers were concerned with standing water in small grain fields

as some remained underwater from seven to ten days. Small grains were also beginning to show nitrogen stress as top dressing continued to be delayed. Livestock were in mostly good condition in February although muddy conditions still made feeding very difficult for most livestock producers.

The unseasonably warm weather in February caused premature budding in some peach trees which were damaged somewhat by the sub-freezing temperatures in March. The cold weather in March also reduced tobacco greenhouse seedling populations and compromised alfalfa and grain growth.

2ND QUARTER

(April, May, June)

Standing water and muddy field conditions hindered field activities during the early part of April, however unseasonably warm temperatures caused good growth in pastures and hay in most localities. Peaches were in full bloom and in mostly good condition, recovering from March frost damage.

Temperatures were much cooler the second week of the month with frost in some Piedmont and Western localities. Small grains showed rapid growth, however reduced yields for late seeded wheat remained a concern.

Heavywidespread rains and muddy fields limited field activities during the first week of May. Rainfall accompanied by hail stopped planting progress in some southeastern localities and caused damage to wheat, corn and cotton. Some northern producers reported having very short hay due to cooler temperatures and a late frost.

Rain continued the second week with temperatures reaching 90 degrees in most localities by the end of the week allowing fields to dry down. Corn planting fell behind both the previous year and the five-year average and some corn acres were replanted due to

flood damage.

During the last part of May weather conditions were varied with overcast and rainy conditions in some localities. Other areas experienced ideal conditions for hay making. Hail in isolated southwestern localities caused an undetermined amount of damage to apples and peaches.

Wheat and corn crops were also affected. Many producers were able to resume field activities, making tremendous progress in crop planting and hay making. Small grain producers anticipated reduced yields from disease and weather related problems.

During the first week of June, Western and Southwestern areas were drying out after receiving as much as three inches of rainfall. Other areas received only trace amounts. Some Northern localities reported potential crop and fruit damage due to wind and hail storms. Small grain harvesting was underway with mostly average to poor yields and low test weights. Some weather damaged barley and wheat acres were cut for hay. Blue mold was detected in several burley tobacco fields as conditions were ideal for infestation. Soybeans were in good to excellent condition, although some producers reported problems with thrip. Many localities in the state received significant mid-June rainfall.

Hot, dry weather returned the last week in June along with intense thunderstorms in the Western part of the state. Corn and soybean crops remained in good to excellent condition, while small grain producers continued to be plagued by lodging, as well as, scab and other grain head diseases. Small grain producers continued to be disappointed by low quality, low test weights, and low prices.

3RD QUARTER

(July, August, September)

July began with widely scattered thunderstorms throughout the State. Producers reported normal crop development but began to be concerned with drying conditions that began mid-month. Small grain harvest was nearly completed and some farmers were reporting test weights that were the lowest in over 20 years. Peach producers started harvesting their crop earlier than normal.

Dry conditions persisted the first part of August while overall crop conditions and moisture supplies continued to decline. Many corn producers were expecting to harvest silage a few weeks earlier than normal and some reported corn being a total loss as the stalks dried prematurely. Livestock producers were forced to move livestock to emergency pastures.

Hurricane Bonnie caused severe crop damage to isolated areas in the extreme southeastern part of the State during the last week of August. High winds caused excessive lodging in corn. Most areas, however, received little or no rain or high winds from the storm. Summer apple and peach harvest were beginning to wind down. Tobacco harvesting continued to be ahead of schedule for all types.

Hot weather continued during the early weeks of September further stressing most crops. Corn harvest for both grain and silage remained ahead of schedule with many farmers reporting that they began harvest early this year in preparation for Hurricanes Bonnie and Earl. Soybean progress continued to advance ahead of schedule

as well. Fruit producers reported early ripening due to hot, dry conditions. Summer apple and peach harvest were winding down with fall apple harvest beginning in some areas. Many livestock producers throughout the state started to market cattle earlier than usual due to dry pastures and dwindling water supplies. Though conditions for most crops continued to decline mid-September, many cotton and peanut producers reported their crops were ahead of schedule and harvest would begin in the coming weeks. Tobacco harvest continued throughout the State with burley and fire types being harvested ahead of schedule and flue lagging slightly behind. Some flue tobacco producers were slow harvesting due to a shortage of barn space.

Dry weather continued through September. Livestock producers across the Commonwealth reported poor pasture conditions forced them to dip into winter hay stocks. Full season soybeans were nearly ready to harvest with overall yields expected to be slightly less than 1997. A few soybean producers reported that yields would potentially be higher than earlier indicated. Many cotton producers were in the process of defoliating and some were already harvesting. Peanut producers were preparing equipment for harvest as well. The lack of topsoil moisture slowed progress of small grain planting. Some producers were baling corn stalks and anything else that could be used to feed livestock.

Scattered rain fell throughout the Commonwealth the first week in October helping to replenish much needed topsoil moisture. Some soybean producers reported slightly higher than anticipated yields. Small grain planting was still at a standstill in many areas due to hard, dry soil conditions. Livestock producers found it necessary to carry water as well as supplemental feed to their herds. Cattle were marketed at lighter weights because of less than ideal conditions during the summer months.

Cotton harvest continued to be ahead of the five-year average. Small grain seeding was underway in many areas but was still behind the five-year average.

Scattered rain showers across the Commonwealth the first week of November caused a temporary stoppage of fall harvest and planting.

Dry conditions made it necessary for producers to increase their feeding of livestock from supplemental to full-scale levels. Many producers continued to water their livestock from private wells, as creeks and ponds remained well below normal levels. With the exception of double-cropped soybeans nearly all summer crops were harvested. Mild temperatures during the end of November were good for

livestock with 81% remaining in fair or better condition.

Unseasonably mild temperatures continued into December. While mild temperatures allowed producers to graze their herds on available pastures for longer than was previously expected, a prolonged lack of significant rainfall caused many producers to engage in heavy culling of their herds in spite of low beef prices.

Seasonal temperatures returned the middle part of December. Many areas also received the first significant rainfall in some time. Livestock producers found it necessary to begin feeding at full winter levels as the month went on in order to maintain good body condition.

As December came to a close, many areas of the Commonwealth received significant amounts of ice and snowfall. No reports of significant damage to small grains were reported. While the ice and snow melt helped to replenish surface water sources, most areas report that additional precipitation was necessary to recharge ground water tables to necessary levels.